

**Valedictory Address
To the North Atlantic Council
Ambassador Nicholas Burns
March 2, 2005**

Secretary General and colleagues, thank you for this opportunity to speak, as is the tradition of our valedictory addresses, not on behalf of my government, but in a personal capacity. You will understand, however, that the DNA of a career diplomat in the American Foreign Service, as well as a healthy interest in self-preservation, makes any collision of views with my own government a remote possibility.

I have been truly honored to represent the United States here at NATO during a vital and often tumultuous time in the history of our great Alliance.

My country believes very deeply in this institution. I am proud of America's founding role in NATO during the Cold War and of all we did with our allies to defend Western Europe from Soviet aggression. I am equally proud that we in NATO today are also making a difference in Afghanistan, Kosovo, Bosnia and Iraq.

NATO is unique. There has been nothing like it in history. We owe its success to the combined talents, energies, ambitions and tenacity of the peoples of Europe and North America. Literally millions of our young soldiers, sailors and airmen stood guard for the last sixty years as, in President Kennedy's words, "Watchmen on the walls of world freedom". They succeeded beyond all expectations as a force for liberation and peace. We today are the inheritors of their hopeful and historic legacy and we should preserve it with care.

I have felt privileged to sit at this table with such able and dedicated representatives from twenty-five allied countries. It has been one of the great experiences of my professional life. We have accomplished great things together. We have also debated and argued, quibbled over minor and major points of NATO theology and even divided over a controversial war. But, here we are today as custodians of the transatlantic relationship. Nearly fifty-six years after the signing of the Washington Treaty, each of us remains convinced that there is no better way for Europe and North America than to be united in the one organization that gives us the chance to create a more hopeful and more peaceful future.

Secretary General, it has been a distinct privilege, as well, to have served with you and your distinguished predecessor, Lord Roberston. He carried NATO through the difficult aftermath of the Kosovo War, reshaped our military capabilities, brought in the greatest number of new members in our history, and presided with a clever wit and with common sense in the best British tradition.

You have been, and will continue to be, a remarkable Secretary General who is so representative of the historical virtues of the Dutch character – solid, steadfast, a rock of certainty in difficult times, a bridge between disputatious Permanent Representatives, of

whom I occasionally was one – if you will forgive me for that in the best Dutch tradition of tolerance. I have enjoyed every moment of our collaboration and friendship. You have led NATO into Iraq and into partnership with the Arab world and Israel and you will lead us to a more significant role in Afghanistan. You are giving NATO a stronger political voice. Thank you, Jaap, for all you have done and will continue to do, for NATO.

If I could have chosen any one period in the history of the Alliance to sit at this table, it would be these last four years, even with all their difficulties, disappointments and turmoil.

We in the NAC have been present at the creation of a new NATO, larger, more expansive in its ambition, better prepared for new missions than the old NATO we left behind in the 1990s. We have introduced the most significant reforms in NATO's history, embarked on military missions in places that would have been unthinkable less than a decade ago, and extended the democratic space of the transatlantic community further than any of us would have dared to imagine.

We declared Article 5 for the very first time in history, ended the out of area debate by resolving to go anywhere to defend our alliance, created the new NATO Response Force, admitted seven new members, defended Turkey before the Iraq war, modernized our decision-making process and created a new command in Norfolk, Virginia, began missions in South Asia and in the heart of the Middle East, declared zero tolerance for trafficking in women and children, and began new partnerships with Russia and Ukraine. And, finally last week, our leaders returned here to this table to declare a truce in our long argument over Iraq to agree to push forward again on the vital challenges of our day – together in NATO.

Of all of our many achievements, the most important step we took was to accept the largest group of new members in our history. Forty percent of us now represent formerly communist countries. I have felt deeply inspired to have you join us as allies. When we look across the table to see Harri, Aivis and Ginte, we are reminded of the importance of freedom and the fundamental lesson that we must be prepared to sacrifice as they did in order to preserve it. We know that to be true when we reflect on the liberation of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania from an unjustifiable Soviet occupation. When we look at Jerzy, we see the growing strength and leadership in NATO of Poland. Karel and Janos have shown us how the Czech Republic and Hungary are models for the future of the Balkans. Bogdan and Lubomir recall for us how well and how much Romania and Bulgaria have done in Iraq. Matjaz and Igor remind us that Slovakia and Slovenia are now defending other peoples' freedoms in Afghanistan.

Secretary General, in recalling its recent history, how can anyone conclude that NATO is nothing but engaged, reforming, purposeful, relevant?

It was Kai Eide who reminded us several weeks ago that we spend far too much time complaining about what is wrong with NATO and too little reflecting on what is going

right. As one often guilty of this practice, I must admit that, not for the first time, Kai is right and we should heed his advice.

The cynics say NATO is faltering because the Cold War glue that had previously bound us to one another has disappeared. While recent world events have surely altered our strategic calculus, I disagree emphatically that our long Alliance marriage is headed for either separation or divorce. Consider the following:

First, our fifty-year plus history in NATO teaches us one lesson – democratic allies will never succeed in living together in a state of perfect and harmonious marital bliss. We remain a collection of free allies with our own unique cultures and traditions. We should expect to disagree. These inevitable differences should not lead us to proclaim that the sky is falling when the French and Americans argue, as we have in the past and surely will in the future. We are not built, after all, on the ideological conformity of the Warsaw Pact.

In the last fifty years alone, we have averaged roughly one tempestuous transatlantic argument per decade. Think of Suez in 1956, the Skybolt Affair and Vietnam in the 1960s, arguments over the Pershing Missiles and Soviet pipelines in the 80s, and bitter disputes over Bosnia in the early 1990s before we ended that war and secured the peace. At each of these junctures, NATO bent under the force of our disagreements but did not break. In fact, each dispute tended to make us stronger and reinforced our bonds. And so it will be with Iraq.

The second reason our transatlantic marriage is going to last is that we need each other. Our mutual interests will keep the marriage going. Americans understand that we cannot hope to be successful in confronting a future of global and transnational challenges without the friendship and support of Europe. We face a torrent of threats that are flowing over, beneath and right through our borders – climate change, narcotics trafficking, international crime, threats from failed states, chemical, biological and nuclear proliferation, terrorism. We need European energy, intelligence, support and partnership to have a hope of conquering any of them.

I venture to say that Europe needs the U.S., too. Europeans do not possess the capacity to defend this continent from conventional, chemical, biological or nuclear threats. You do not provide for it in your new constitution. The reality is that Europe will need its alliance with the United States and Canada to protect its own people in the decades ahead. You know that you can depend on us. That is why NATO continues to be so vital for your future.

Secretary General, this rather optimistic future in which I believe very deeply does not mean that we can look ahead with exaggerated confidence. To ensure NATO's future success, we will need to look frankly at our shortcomings and to address them.

Among the many things that need to be fixed in our complex Alliance, I would cite five challenges as most in need of our collective attention:

1. The European Allies Must Begin to Assume a Greater Share of the Military Burden

It is a simple fact that the U.S. will always shoulder the greatest military burden in the Alliance. But, the military capability and usability gaps between the U.S. and most allies are widening at an alarming rate. U.S. national defense spending this year will more than double the combined total of all our allies and the U.S. can deploy a far greater percentage of our forces to hot spots. This imbalance cannot be sustained forever in a collective defense organization. Europe cannot have it both ways. European dreams to strengthen the EU's military might well founder on a simple lack of resources. Allies need to make the case to European politicians and the public that strength and influence are derived from the ability to field fully modern and effective armed forces.

2. We Must Be Much More Ambitious About our Operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

For all our success in conceptualizing a new vision for NATO's future, we have still not found the resources to match our political ambitions. In Iraq, for example, we have deployed far too slowly and fitfully. We congratulated ourselves last week for having raised more than four million euros, but this is a paltry sum given the degree of need and the importance of speedy assistance to embattled Iraqis. Iraq is the most important test in the world today for Europe and America, but NATO is not doing as much as it should. In a collective mission decided upon by all, five allies continue to prohibit their officers at our military commands from participating in this mission. This is just not right.

In Afghanistan, the U.S. still fields more than twice as many soldiers as all European countries combined. The greatest military alliance in history should not have to beg and borrow to equip our military mission in Iraq and Afghanistan. But, that is our reality and we simply must do better.

The reality today is that it is the U.S. proposing the most ambitious use of NATO as a collective instrument – in Iraq, in unifying the missions in Afghanistan, and in embarking on a new partnership with the Arab world and Israel.

3. NATO Should be our Central Forum for Critical Political Discussion:

As we saw last week, the U.S.-EU dialogue will be critical for our common future. But, on many of the most important issues, NATO will be the central forum for a simple reason, as President Bush said last week – is it the only place where Europeans and Americans work together every day as allies and it is America's only security link to Europe.

As you all know, the U.S. has brought on average one senior American official per week to NATO for discussion with allies. We have used NATO as a political forum intensively and want this room to be the place where we debate the most critical challenges to us. We hope Europeans will choose this forum too and encourage you to do so in the months ahead as we discuss terrorism, Iraq and what we can do to help Africa.

4. The Future of NATO is in Building our Partnerships

NATO is expanding its strategic vision East and South because that is the only way to continue to construct a democratic peace in Europe. Russia, Ukraine, the countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia and the states of the broader Middle East will all be critical to Europe's future security. Building bridges to them should be among the highest priorities.

We will also need to secure greater cooperation with the democratic states in Asia that are our partners in Iraq and Afghanistan – Australia, Japan and South Korea.

We should reach out to the United Nations and to the African Union to offer NATO's help to resolve the toughest problems in Africa.

5. Finally, we should let the Military do what it does best – plan and deploy without undue political interference.

We need to modernize our capacity to plan and to deploy our forces more rapidly. That will require radical reform of the way we do business at headquarters. We need reform in Brussels to match the military's reforms in the field.

The NAC all too often ties up our military colleagues in red tape by preventing them from planning on a contingency basis. We interfere in military deliberations by injecting unsought political advice at too early a stage.

The NAC and Military Committee are carefully balanced instruments. We need advice from the Military Committee that is untarnished by political constraints. This is an acute concern of many of our military leaders.

Secretary General, as we look to our common future, there is one last challenge we must confront together – to remember why it is that we have created this great transatlantic alliance in the first place.

Ambassador Peter Ricketts gave each of the Permanent Representatives as a Christmas gift this year, Timothy Garton Ash's new book, *Free World*. Garton Ash's strong hope is that Americans and Europeans will end the "petty squabbling" of the last few years and reflect upon the central truth of our alliance – we are the only fully democratic continents on earth, the most advanced economies with the largest capacity to do good things for the rest of the world and defend our freedom. And so we must remain united. That book and this thought seem to me to strike at the heart of NATO's most significant challenge for the future.

All great countries and alliances in history have stood for something more than sheer self-preservation or devotion to the status quo. Great empires and great armies come and go but they leave no lasting trace of their efforts if they do not stand for an idea to sustain and inspire future generations.

Isn't NATO's one great idea that people should be democratic and free and protected from oppression? Isn't that why we planted our flag in Western Europe fifty years ago to defend freedom and say no to communism? Isn't that why we have invited ten new countries to join us in the last five years – to protect and secure their freedom? And, should that not now be our central motivating purpose – to extend the flag of freedom and security and peace to peoples and countries further south and east?

These are not impossible dreams. These are realizable ambitions for a truly great alliance, renewed for the challenges of a very different time than when we were created. And, in order to achieve them, we will have to be united. Each of us must meet an obligation to give NATO and the European Union the strength of purpose to be agents of freedom in the future.

Americans know that our fundamental interest is to avoid the twin demons of isolationism and unilateralism and to embrace instead a leadership role at the front of NATO and the other great multilateral institutions that bind the free world in common purpose.

If that is America's interest, then I would suggest that Europe's is equally important – to accept and embrace a continued alliance with North America as the only possible way forward into the future. In this sense, Europeans would be wise to reject the illusory advice of those who say that Europe's future is as some sort of countervailing power in strategic competition with the U.S. That misguided notion would turn sixty years of transatlantic harmony on its head. It would divide us and weaken Europe in the process.

The better future, instead, is to see NATO and the European Union as the twin engines of a united transatlantic community determined to build a world of democracy, freedom and peace.

Secretary General, let me close by saying this – I am going to miss NATO very much. One day last week, as a colleague and I walked to lunch in the NATO cafeteria, I heard in a quick trip down a short hallway a babble of languages – German, Polish, Latvian, Italian, French, English. And a very simple thought came to me – what a unique and remarkable place NATO is.

It is a place where people from twenty-six allied and twenty other partner nations and now more than ten Middle East countries come together every day, to listen and learn, to advocate and defend, to respect and tolerate each other's differences, and to weave a thousand threads of thoughts and hopes and dreams into a unique whole through the power of democracy in one great Alliance.

Thousands of people make NATO successful – our brilliant and flawless interpreters, the International and Civilian staffs, the Private Office, our hundreds of committees and agencies; our three dedicated and outstanding military commanders, General Jim Jones,

Admiral Ed Giambastiani and General Harald Kujat and all the military leaders who serve so effectively with them.

I want to thank Ambassador Dominique Struye de Swielande for having been an outstanding host country Ambassador. I admire his professionalism which was on display during our crisis on February 16, 2003.

I cannot leave NATO without thanking my outstanding U.S. Mission staff to whom I owe so much and my two deputies, Victoria Nuland and John Koenig. They more than made up for my many deficiencies.

My wife, Libby, is here today. I am thankful to her for all her support. Our wives and partners have built their own version of the NAC in their frequent lunches, trips to exotic destinations and in the bridges they have built between Europe and America. Sometimes I think they get along better than we do around this table.

It is all of these people whom I will remember, the thousands of civilians and soldiers who make up our NATO family, who remind us daily that our Alliance is still and will be for a long time to come, a great hope for a new, better and free world in the future.